

"FREEDOM" AND FREEDOM

Darkydom "Sence Freedom Broke Out"

A Southern Woman's Views Upon the Results of Emancipation—Slavery's Softer Side—The Irresponsible Younger Generation of Negroes—The Black New Woman and the Servant-Girl Problem—The Hope of the Colored Race—"We Lub Dem Yankees; Dey'll Set Us Free!"

It is a reasonable belief with us Southerners that it was an overruling Providence which took the savage Negro from centuries of horrible slavery, cannibalism and idolatry and placed him under the training of the chivalric Southern people, to the benefit of both races. We are much in debt to the toiling slave for his devotion to his master's interests. We appreciate that he has been a powerful factor in developing our Southland. The rice, sugar and cotton industries owe everything to his co-operation. The benevolent influence of the old slave was equally felt in the home life. Can we ever repay the sympathetic black mammy for her marvellous patience and gentleness? We are also grateful for the wealth of weird and beautiful African melodies in which the Negro has so wonderfully imbedded and preserved the Bible truths.

On the other hand, is not the Negro greatly in the Southerners' debt; and would there not be a better understanding all around if he realized it and publicly expressed occasionally a little loyalty to those who were and are his best friends? Did not our ancestors give him the language—no easy task with hordes of savages? Not only this, but they gave him the benefit of that personal contact which is always so necessary in every effort to uplift humanity. Under the old régime the slaves were taught habits of industry and many trades and the arts of agriculture. Their masters fed and clothed them well, attended them faithfully in illness, and succored them in old age. Best of all, they were given, through hired white ministers, the precious Bible and regular religious teaching. That this is true is easily proved by the striking familiarity of all old ex-slaves with the Bible truths, and by their countless "spirituals" which are all founded upon Bible texts. Many of the best Southern men were abolitionists at heart, feeling slavery to be a burden of wrong, but they could not see how, in justice to both races, they could rid themselves of the incubus.

I have been taught that every true Southern woman spent much of her life in ministering to the spiritual and bodily needs of those so singularly dependent upon her, within her small empire. These women were born to a heritage of peculiar responsibility, and we, their children, should give them great honor for the noble way in which they fulfilled their difficult trust. Some day, when the heavenly accounts are all drawn up and the whole truth is known, there will be revealed the fact that the old slave days with all their abuses were the most unselfish, effective and far-reaching force for missionary good this world has ever known. There lives in Kentucky an old mammy called "Aunty Walker." She once said to me: "My master's niggers had sich a easy time we wuz called free niggers. I wuz proud o' bein' a slave and wuz larned to do eberything well. Slaves wuz jes like chilluns is nowadays, ef you don't keep right ahine 'em, dey shirks dare wuk! Dat's de way de niggers did soon as master's back wuz turned! Den whenever de oberseer gib 'em a little techin' up, off dey'd trot and git along ober de Macy and Dixie line. Hit didn't taken 'em long ter fink up a pack o' lies and make a big, big mouf 'bout how dey wuz beated and starved down South—and chile, yo heah me? Yer knows dese Norven people is jes natuly big hearted and belevin'—hee, hee—dey didn't know nuffin' 'bout how a nigger can't help lyin' like us does, and so dey b'lieve all de lyin' tales dem niggers tol' em and de whole war come on jes' dis heath way. Honey, hit's terrible to fink how de good masters and us good niggers had ter suffer fer dem mazin' triflin', lyin' niggers what had de debbil hisself fer dare fadder!"

Convictions such as these are widespread among the old slaves still living. I have interviewed thousands of Negroes in various parts of the South; have through personal contact all my life fathomed their inmost thoughts, and I declare views as here expressed are representative of a large majority of former slaves.

In Florida lives Aunt Susan. She is a native of Virginia, and the greater part of her life was passed in that State. She looks about fifty years old though she is really over ninety. This splendid old auntie patiently stands at the washtub all day long, rain or shine, under a rickety shed made of barrel staves and old shutters, held together by rope and discarded pieces of harness. She ought to be in bed, so swollen and painful are her ankles with rheumatism.

She was good enough to allow me to come many times to read to her from the Bible, and more than once her conversation naturally drifted into stories of her old plantation days. One rainy day I found her washing in the house, and after she had listened attentively to the reading of her pet story of "Noah and the flood," encouraging me with many an ejaculation of "Dat's so, honey lamb, dat's a true word. Bress de Lord!" I thought to draw her out, so I asked her if she worked harder in the old slavery days than now? This was enough to start her. She instantly let the clothes drop into the tub, and wiping her shrivelled, whitened hands upon her underskirt she began fiercely, "Wuk? You say wuk to me? I wuz n't no fiel' hand! I wuz a house nigger, me myself. Didn't know what wuk wuk! Didn't know I wuz a slave till dem white folks come down heah and tole us 'bout it. Gawd knows us wuz heaps mo' free dem days dan us is now. Dese heah lazy, triflin' niggers done bring all dis trouble on deyselves!" I here inquired what trouble she alluded to. She seemed to grow taller as she replied excitedly, "Trouble? Dis heah trouble of habbin' ter support dere own families. No nigger likes ter hab ter support his own family—it's entirely agin nature. Niggers, dem days, wuz jes like us sees em goin' long now wid der carryin's on. I se neber hab seed a good nigger whipped in all my life, and I se neber seed a bad one whipped enough! Dat ain't heah nor dar, but dere ain't none ob us ole heads been rale happy since freedom broke out!"

I ventured to ask her if her husband was living. She fairly made me gasp when she innocently replied: "Not all ob 'um, tank de Lawd! De white ladies fink dey're habbin' a power of trouble wid jes' one husband. Look at me! Done had four, and all mean niggers—no 'spittin' dat fac'. De last one, Tobe, wuz de meanest one ob de lot, fo' jes' as soon as freedom broke out, he ups and stole jes nuff ter git in de Penetencer an' dar he is ter dis day I reckon, settin' up dar eating hisself fatter dan Br'er Possum, jes ter git shot of supportin' dem chilluns. Let me ax you sumpin', chile. Look at me straight and tell me honest—now I guine ax yer a question."

She tiptoed to the open door and looked up and down the gallery to assure herself that no one was eavesdropping, then shut the door tight, and turned the key in the lock, and coming back to me stealthily, began in a whisper. "Now tell me de trufe, chile; dere ain't nobody guine ter heah—only Gawd am a-lookin' straight in yer heart. So tell me now honest: Did yo ebber see any man, specially any 'oman, what was rale, I say rale happy married? Humph!"

The poor old, simple soul looked so in earnest, and with the door shut and feeling God was looking in my heart I was afraid to tell a story, so I boldly said under my breath, "No, I never did, come to think about it."

This evidently satisfied the old philosopher, as she drew a long breath and exclaimed "Dat's de trufe. Yer sho' tol' it dat time. Now you watch round and mind what I done tol' you. Gawd neber 'ten' no man, specially no 'oman, to be rale happy married. Case fo' why? Case marriage am jes' a discipline, he sends from

heaven ter prepare us fer de next world" (pointing below). "Same way 'bout chilluns. People! Me knows, fur me done had nineteen head o' chillun in the Lawd. I followed right along ahine ma mudder, she had nineteen head for' me."

"Aunt Susan," I asked: "Did you have good luck with your children?"

She drew another long breath, and replied slowly and wearily, shaking her head, and looking up above. "No, honey, I neber had no luck at all!"

"What; did they all die?" I inquired sympathetically.

"Die?" she exclaimed fiercely. "Die? No, chile, dey all libbed—ebbery last hair and hide ob 'em libbed! I neber—had—no—luck—at—all! I fink it's dis heal way 'bout chilluns. When Gawd Almighty sends a nigger woman a big crop o' chillun de best ting Him kin do is ter harvest 'em up in heaven, whar dare po' mudder knows dey is safe and out er harm's way. Des' look at my misery long o' chilluns. Dey all done gone bad since de Yankees turn 'em loose. De oldest, Jeems, wuz hung, de next one ought to have been, one ob de lot am in the penitencier, Sammy's in de calaboose in town now dis heal minute fur bein' drunk and 'orderly.' My gals ain't like de gals used ter be—dey married bad, and supportin' lazy niggers and rafts o' chilluns. Dem what ain't is too stuck up ter work out at a homes' liflin' since dey learned ter read and write. Dey neber help ders old mudder! Not eben Abe, what's a porter on a Pullman train, neber sends me a picayune. I neber gets a Lawd's cent."

At this juncture an almost white mulatto boy of about eleven years of age came running in with grinning cheeks. He rushed up to the old woman and kissed her heartily. She gave his palet lock a jerk and pulled his head first up, then down, and said, "Whar's all yo' manners dese days nohow? Curtsey to de lady—yo' heah?" Then changing her manner and tone to a caressing one, she kissed his injured head and said, soothingly: "Patrick Henry, you is cuttin' de best chile I got. Fotch de lady some corn pone and butter-milk I done put up on de high shelf in de cupboard whar I know yer could n't find it. Dat's a good boy. He's de best chile I ebber had. Him is ma youngest baby."

I said incredulously: "Why, Aunt Susan, he can't be your child! What makes you tell him such —?"

Here she interrupted me as Patrick Henry made his exit in a handspring. "Hish, child, hish!" So I hished: "Don't say nuffin' fo' him fur Gawd's sake!"

She wiped away a rising tear with her knuckles. "I'll tell you how it wuz he come ter be my last baby. Mandy Jane wuz sho' nuff my youngest baby, and she wuz visiting back home, and, like all dese young niggers, she would steal, and so she took some money from a Yankee gentleman she wuz washin' fer, and when de sheriff come fer her her baby wuz n't but one day old. I had heahed him comin' in de front do' and had done step her off thoo de old cornfield and she dug out fer de Norf, and cose dere wusn't no body like Mandy libbed dare. I told him I jes' had a young baby, and I tuk her little baby and come down heah ter Fleuridy and passed it off fur ma very own." Her tears were falling fast and she shook with emotion. "Oh, don't say nuffin' fo' him fur Gawd's sake: he fink I his onliest mammy—po' leetle lamb—and the b'lieve he ma youngest baby—and de neighbors don't know no better. Please don't neber tell him de trufe," and I never told him.

This glimpse into Aunt Susan's philosophy shows the position so many of the old slaves take regarding the new responsibilities thrust upon them. I have yet to find any old Negroes who will tell me they had a cruel master. It is always "some other Negro" they knew about! Indeed, I have been told all my life by ex-masters that in the slave days any men who mistreated their slaves were socially ostracized. Isolated examples of brutality only serve to bring into stronger contrast the great mass of Christian slave owners to whom cruelty or oppression was an impossibility.

If only those who talk and write the most upon the great "wrongs of the Negro race" could live South for a few years they would find their opinions quickly veering around, and before long be thoroughly "reconstructed" Yankees. They would discover that the self-respecting Negro who is industrious is treated with consideration and esteem, and that the demand for efficient house servants and workmen far exceeds the supply. Our Southern housekeepers do not yet receive the benefits of the Negro's education, which we so largely pay for—nor direct results so far as strained house service is concerned. As a rule the graduate of a colored college fits herself to teach or nurse or for some other profession, and usually moves North. The only outcome we see is the lamentable state of affairs that we cannot build up any more the restful, ideal homes our mothers and grandmothers did, because we cannot have the faithful nurses and cooks they had. Now every mistress of a home spends her whole life in teaching unwilling colored women to do housework, only to have them fail the first time company comes or someone is taken ill.

We Southerners are not strong enough to do our own work, nor have we the knowledge or system. So we have to submit to trials and vexations our Northern sisters would not tolerate. Slavery days are not over for Southern mistresses so long as we can't wash a handkerchief clean to save our lives! The chronic complaint all over the South is "No girl," and here we see thousands of sickly mistresses whereas our mothers were robust and able to rear large, happy and healthy families and so live out their own best selves. Ask any Southerner if he does not know personally of several small towns where there are hundreds of idle colored girls, while people all about are trying in vain to induce them to work. They seem to consider themselves above menial work. How some of them live is a sad mystery. Once in a small town, after doing my own work for a little while, I became so exhausted that I felt desperate enough to offer the first sable goddess I'd met to give her vocal lessons and to throw in the use of piano and the parlor for receiving her beau.

At last I secured a high-stepping maid, who, after putting enough questions to me to satisfy the greedy census man, said to me loftily, "Well, I'll come try you for a week if you'll promise to only have one tablecloth in wash a week, for Dr. P. says I'm weak in my arms; and I can't wash your windows, for I belong to the Union League." This meant I was to wash the windows, which I weekly did, and at least got the corners clean, which she could never have done! I engaged her to rest my body, and after a week of her impudence and airs I discharged her in a hurry to rest my mind. Our "brother in black" is free—but as for the poor sister in white, she is yet to be liberated.

Mrs. S. lives in Massachusetts and writes a great many fine papers upon the oppression of the Negro for her missionary society, and recently she has gone to North Carolina to live. In four weeks she has tried eight cooks, and if one may read between the lines in her interesting letters to me her views are slowly changing. She once said to me, "It's the way you Southern people treated them that makes them steal so, and makes them such bad servants." I replied: "A leopard cannot change his spots." She retorted: "The spots, if there are any, were put in during the degradation of slavery," and I warmly answered: "We know they were dyed deep way back in Africa! and besides they were in worse slavery before coming to us."

But let's see her progress. In her next letter she frankly rehearses all her grievances to me as if she were the first white victim the up-to-date Negro servant had ever subjugated! I consider her very unreasonable and exacting. Why she even objects to the cook's carrying home a basketful of provisions every night. She would be a stingy colored mother who would let "de ten head o' chillun starve de Lawd done sent her!" My friend is sur-

prised that the kitchen is filled with the cook's friends at every meal time! Does she want her cook to continue to dispense Southern hospitality? She seemed greatly shocked because her poultry, scissors and underskirts keep disappearing! Now, any Southerner of good traditions expects certain Negroes to be Socialists as regards chickens and food, and scissors and medicine and underskirts. In fact, they like to share almost everything in common! Mrs. S. does not like it that she never can find hot water in the kitchen, and Sally Ann will boil eggs in the teakettle! She writes in disgust that two of her cooks left with no warning and one day, while dinner was burning up, Melinda was off in her own room rubbing a face-bleach on her skin and applying the new preparation for removing kinks from African locks!

At last the climax is reached. Let me quote: "Do send me a white girl. I'm nearly distracted, and I've a houseful of company. I take it all back—you are all martyrs since the war. How can you put up with their shiftless, lazy ways, when your mothers had such noble faithful service? These young ones who are free are too impudent and mean. If I could only get one of the old mammies so many have had around here for years! Hereafter I'll call every Southern woman a missionary, for they seem to take it all patiently as a matter of course. This last piece I thought so good is named Temperance, and she takes two hours to eat her breakfast and two others to wash the china, and insisted upon washing it with an old sock and drying it on a piece of old skirt—notwithstanding an array of clean dishcloths swinging over her head! When I remonstrated she flounced out of the kitchen and ran out to the yard screaming, 'Wash 'em yourself! I won't be nobody's nigger!' I found my rings behind her looking-glass, and now she sends me word she is going to sue me for goodness knows what. These Negro servants I find have it all their own way. After a while you Southern women must turn and send abroad for foreign help, o', best of all, do as we do in New England, train your daughters in the healthful athletics of the kitchen and laundry so as to be independent of this colored new woman. I'd like that nice girl you told me of at the Wetmore Home. If you can still get her." So endeth poor Mrs. S.'s lesson!

The new Negroes are not all spoiled, thank heaven! There are some perfect cooks among them who are so obliging and well trained that everyone wants them. The Government ought to pension a cook after a lifetime of faithful service to her country. She can discount all the chefs in the world in her fried chicken and beaten biscuit and gumbo. Such good cooks keep off indigestion, doctor's bills and make homes happy, and contribute a'm st as much to a family's joy as a brand-new baby, and if they do give us more fried dishes—no Southerner ever has dyspepsia.

I was so fortunate as to run across a typical old mammy the other day right here in New York. She wears a bandanna headress and is from Tennessee, and evidently does not approve of the new order of things. Her first words were of interest. She said: "How I likes de North?—hits a purty big city; tain't no place for nobody like you and me what's been brought up to do nuffin'! Pears ter me like hit a'n't nuff but work, work, work, no luf—no fun—no Jesus Christ nor nuffin—I washes and irons ma finger nails off, and when I goes ter sleep, dare sets de bundle of washin', a pile high up so on my chist! Sence freedom broke out, look at everything—a-changin—even de 'oomens is a-tryin' ter be big mens—I 'longs ter a club, and de 'oomens tink dey's so big; 'Hi-yi' doy say, to Gawd. 'Us kin make a better 'oman dan yo ever fought ob makin,' and—heee—Gawd he answer back, 'I neber made no 'oman could be a first-rate mudder ob de family and de man ob de house same time.' I 'se been a watchin' dis freedom, an' hits a-needed' chalnin' up; dat's what make I say what I does case I see do debbil he got holb on one eend of freedom and de Lawd He got holb on de udder. But de Lawd he'll sho' come out on top and dare won't be no more tanglement den honey. Amen!"

Where do they get all their philosophy from? So, then, my colored mammy has solved the problem—this hated trouble of securing willing help at the South. Why have we never thought that all our difficulties are due to Satan's abuse of Freedom, which he delights in making "break out" in so many distressing ways in order to blind men's eyes to its holier and inevitable possibilities. We all know God's true Freedom will triumph for all mankind in the end. We are satisfied that even now in this transition stage we should not have this difficulty in obtaining good service if the Negro race would heed and follow the teachings of the noble leader, Booker T. Washington, and others, who would have them understand that working with their hands is nobly serving their Maker!

This remarkable man is the result of pre-natal slavery training, and an earnest of what God intends for all the Negro race who use Freedom aright. He appreciates, as few of them do, the value of the South's friendship. Perhaps he realizes that the South has always loved his people in a way the North never will, and that it is not to the interest of either the emancipated master or slave to antagonize a true and tried friend?

One must indeed be a blind student of the development of the Afro-American who does not see what marvellous advancement numbers of the colored race are making along many lines of learning. If the franchise be taken away it will be a great blessing in disguise, for it will result in the whole race's speedily educating itself so as to vote intelligently and honestly. Sometimes I feel that if we were to give the Negroes no further help financially it would only retard, not permanently check, their ultimate education, for the Negro perhaps has now sufficient brains and force within his own ranks to go on forever lifting up and educating his own kind. Even in bondage with no learning the race showed evidence of having remarkable talents of music, oratory, ministry and story telling. No matter where his future is to lie, he should have an all-round mental, moral and physical education to prepare him for his great duties; if in this country to help him in solving the problems which he, with the South, now faces, and later the North will face; if in Africa, to build up an African nationality there and become one of the world's great Powers.

An old nurse in Louisville used to sing to us a beautiful cradle song which she said the slaves sang to help bring on the Civil War. And they would sing persistently, in spite of the master's threats of "shutting up the prayers' houses if they did not stop it." It is martial in tune and spirit, and entitled, "Gawd bless dem Yankees; dey'll set me free," which seems, in the light of Cuba's emancipation and present crisis to breathe a deep spirit of prophecy. The second verse, "Gawd bless dem Yankees, we lub 'em sweet," one may imagine was not sweet music to Southern ears.

How time has changed things, for since so many Southerners have come North to struggle for bread and butter, and the Northerners have lovingly held out their hands of help and fellowship, we, too, can sing with the old mammy, "Gawd bless dem Yankees, we lub 'em sweet." This righteous Spanish war has left us no North and no South. We are all Yankees together, for in each soldier's grave there lies the "buried hatchet" of the Blue and the Gray! Our statue of Liberty will mean more and more, for is not the day coming when the oppressed in all the world will join in the grand chorus, "God bless dem Yankees, dey'll set me free," until the very name of Yankee shall become a synonym for brotherly love, for universal fellowship, for the real freedom—the true liberty of Christ!

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